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Court upholds conviction of Ricky Holland's adoptive mom

ASSOCIATED PRESS • June 25, 2008

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LANSING — The Michigan Court of Appeals has upheld the murder conviction of a Williamston woman who was found guilty of killing her adopted 7-year-old son.

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Lisa Holland said her 2006 trial in Ingham County should have been moved because media publicity deprived her of a fair trial. The 36-year-old also says evidence of Ricky Holland's cause of death and prior abuse against him shouldn't have been heard by jurors.

The appeals court disagreed in a unanimous ruling released today.

Lisa Holland is serving life without parole for the boy's 2005 death. Her husband is serving between 30 and 60 years after pleading guilty to second-degree murder.

Tim Holland testified his wife struck Ricky with a hammer and had abused the boy by restraining him with ropes and not feeding him.

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Autopsy shows 2-year-old accidentally drowned

Adults at home didn't know he was in their care, police say

By Christy Arboscello • Free Press Staff Writer • June 25, 2008


The cause of death for a 2-year-old Detroit boy found unconscious in a Clinton Township swimming pool last week has been officially ruled an accidental drowning, township police said today.

The boy was discovered Friday evening by his mother's boyfriend in an in-ground pool on Knollwood Court in the 17 Mile and Garfield area. It's unknown how long he was in the water because several adults in the home were not aware he was in their care, police said.

His mother and her boyfriend left the house belonging to the child's grandmother earlier that day. The grandmother left soon after, but believed he would be supervised by several relatives inside the house. Those family members told police they did not know they should have been watching him, Detective Lt. Mark Rybinski said.

"Nobody really knew he was there," Rybinski said.

The colonial's backyard is gated by a privacy fence. There was no separate safety fence surrounding the pool. The township ordinance requires that residential properties with in-ground pools have either backyard fences or gates directly around the pools, but it does not call for home owners to install both, he said.



June 24, 2008

To Avoid Student Turnover, Parents Get Rent Help

By [ERIK ECKHOLM](#)

FLINT, Mich. — Because he has moved so often, 9-year-old Richard Kennedy has already attended four different schools in Flint. In his mother's latest rental house the other day, he described how it felt to enter an unfamiliar classroom.

"My mind gets mixed up," he said softly. "They're always starting with different stuff than what I know."

He could only nod, tears welling up, when asked if it was hard to make new friends.

The frequent dislocations may help explain why he is being held back in the fourth grade, and why his 11-year-old sister, who has attended eight different schools, can barely read. No one doubts that the constant turnover of students here is taking a huge educational toll on those who move too much and, less obviously, those who stay put, too.

In some of Flint's elementary schools, half or more of the students change in the course of a school year — in one school it reached 75 percent in 2003. The moves are usually linked to low, unstable incomes, inadequate housing and chaotic lives, and the recent rash of foreclosures on landlords is adding to the problem, forcing renters from their homes. The resulting classroom turmoil led the State Department of Human Services to start an unusual experiment, paying some parents \$100 a month in rent subsidies to help them stay put — a rare effort to address the damaging turnover directly.

Such house-hopping, and school disruption, is common in low-income urban areas across the country, with annual turnover of students typically ranging from 30 percent to 50 percent, said David Kerbow, an education researcher at the [University of Chicago](#) who has studied student mobility, a problem sometimes overlooked by education planners.

As the federal government demands more accountability from schools, high turnover is increasingly recognized as a threat to education and has been a source of concern in districts from Baltimore to Denver. In New York, board of education officials said that while they did not have data on trends in student mobility, it had been a prime reason behind efforts to standardize curriculums, so students switching schools would not find their math classes, for example, far out of sync.

High turnover can undermine a multiyear improvement plan. "It becomes a different school, because the core of the students you're educating has changed," Dr. Kerbow said.

Even the students who do not switch schools suffer, because teachers must spend more time reviewing

materials for newcomers and tend to introduce less material, Dr. Kerbow said, citing what his research had found in Chicago. "The learning trajectory over time is flattened," he added.

Some of the changes in Flint reflect the district's loss of 1,000 students a year as parents move out in search of work. But most involve families cycling through homes within the city. Children switch from school to school, even returning repeatedly to the same one, as their parents become overextended on rent in one place, try another rental, flee an unsafe block or move in with a relative or a new partner.

Flint has yawning concrete fields where auto factories once stood. Between the mass loss of factory jobs and middle-class flight, many streets are left with rental houses in various states of disrepair, punctuated by boarded-up houses.

Officials here, as throughout the reeling auto belt, acknowledge that higher education is the key to a new economy. But the churning of students in the early grades imperils their ability to complete high school, let alone college.

Linda Thompson, Flint's schools superintendent, said that when she was a principal a few years ago at Washington Elementary School, 300 of the 500 students changed in a single year. In response, Ms. Thompson has made it a priority to align the curriculum at all the district's schools more closely.

To fight the residential turmoil in two of the most afflicted schools, Washington and Bryant, the State Department of Human Services began an experiment in 2004 called the Genesee Scholars Program intended to keep a group of second graders intact for two years. Since the program began, two groups of about 40 families have participated, one in 2004 and the other in 2006; officials said they knew of no other program like it.

The central attraction is the \$100-a-month rent subsidy, which is paid directly to landlords, who in turn agree not to raise rents and to keep the houses up to code. The money comes from state agencies.

Perhaps equally important, the students remain with the same teacher and the same classmates for second and third grade.

The families also benefit from a popular state offering in which two caseworkers are assigned to each selected school in what is known as a family resource center. These centers offer a convenient, friendly alternative to large, impersonal offices where parents can arrange for social services like food stamps.

Results from the 2004 group showed that participants in the rent-subsidy program moved less, and the third graders scored significantly higher on a statewide test. The 2006 phase of the program has just been completed, and the results are being evaluated. Officials hope that with more data, they can raise money to expand the program.

The program is popular with parents, and not just for the money. Sinceria Williams, 27, and her partner of 11 years, Marcus Turner, 37, had been living with their six children, ages 3 through 11, in a substandard house

that was an unreliable bus ride from Bryant Elementary School.

When they signed up their son Marcus Jr., 9 and finishing third grade, officials helped them find a nicer house within walking distance of the school.

“The extra hundred dollars was how we could afford this house,” said Mr. Turner, who has worked in construction but is now laid up with gout. The family has been living on the Social Security survivor benefits from his dead father and food stamps.

With the extra money, he added, “we were also able to save up a little for a wedding,” which the couple plans for August.

Ms. Williams, who plans to resume work this fall in a day care center, said the classroom continuity, and the sense of being in a special group, had made a big difference for her son, who no longer looked for excuses to stay home from school and whose grades had climbed.

Richard Kennedy, the struggling fourth grader who has attended four schools, did not arrive at his latest in time to enter the scholars program.

His mother, Jennifer Burnash, 30, has filled her living room with photos of Richard and his sister and their framed school certificates for citizenship and attendance. They live on her monthly disability check of \$637, utility aid, cash assistance for the children, \$247 a month in food stamps and the money her boyfriend makes doing odd jobs for their landlord.

They have been in their home for more than a year now, but in the last decade, she said, “I’ve moved so many times that I’ve lost track.”

At one point, they fled after a house was shot up by gang members angry with her brother. She tried living in Indianapolis but gave up after three months because the rent was too high. Even in Flint, where houses are available for \$300 to \$600 a month, “rent is the main thing that hurts you,” Ms. Burnash said.

As for Richard, he tried moving in with his father, but it did not work out.

“I plan on staying here,” Ms. Burnash said, despite the crumbling ceilings. “I love this home.”

There are signs that she means to stay this time. She and her boyfriend have planted grass in a corner of the barren backyard, and they plan to expand it into a lawn, one section at a time.

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State Pays Rent to Keep Kids in School

Posted: 9:51 PM Jun 24, 2008

Last Updated: 9:51 PM Jun 24, 2008

Reporter: Jamie Edmonds

Email Address: jamie.edmonds@wilx.com

Sinceria Williams and her six kids got a surprise from the state a few years ago... rent money.

"I was pretty shocked to know that they even did something like that," she said.

It's part of an experiment called the Genesee Scholars Program in Flint. The Department of Human Services pays \$100 a month in rent directly to the landlord. In exchange, families stay put.

"We have identified children in two schools that have a high mobility rate and low test scores," Sheryl Thompson said.

Thompson is the director of the Genesee County DHS. She said before the program, at one elementary school in Flint, 75 percent of students who started the year, did not finish at the same school.

"Kids who change schools lose about two months of education," Thompson said.

Since 2004, about 80 second graders and their families participated.

The last rent stipend was paid this month.

"We've seen improvements, " she said. "Most of all in attendance. Kids are going to school."

Sinceria's partner Marcus said the money has helped the family move to a better home and given their kids stability.

"I know they love going to school right now," he said.

MEAP scores for the most recent participants haven't been released, but the first group met or exceeded the state average in reading, writing, and math.

"Teachers have seen the improvements," Thompson said.

Thompson said she's shared the information with other counties across the state and hopes other schools take advantage.

Get smarter, not tougher, dealing with youth crime

BY ELIZABETH ARNOVITS • JUNE 25, 2008

Michigan's juvenile justice system, like many others across the country, is ripe for a fundamental transformation -- and not a moment too soon. While proper treatment of juveniles can lead to productive lives, our system works to increase crime and limit the future of the youths it is designed to help.

We do know what works. Over the past two decades, innovative programs in Michigan and elsewhere have compiled powerful new evidence on effective ways to combat delinquency.

- First, the number of youths tried in adult courts and punished in adult prisons must be reduced. Every year, roughly 200,000 youths under age 18 are tried in adult courts nationwide. Michigan is one of only 12 states that automatically treat 17-year-olds as adults, and our laws give prosecutors broad power to try juveniles of any age as adults for serious crimes. More than 500 Michigan youths, ages 15-18, are currently doing time in adult prisons.

Yet research finds that youths tried as adults go on to commit more subsequent crime -- and more violent crime -- than youths of the same age with similar offenses who remain in the juvenile system. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2007 concluded: "Transferring juveniles to the adult system is counterproductive as a strategy for preventing or reducing violence."

- Second, we must reduce overreliance on secure confinement and invest in effective community-based services. Only 24% of incarcerated teens across the country are guilty of violent felonies. Some 45% are guilty only of status

offenses, probation violations, or lesser crimes unrelated to violence, weapons or drug trafficking.

What happens to these young people? Recidivism studies routinely show that 50% to 80% of youths released from juvenile correctional facilities are rearrested within two to three years -- even those who were not serious offenders prior to confinement. Moreover, locking kids up costs taxpayers -- incarceration typically costs \$200 to \$300 per youth per day, far more than intensive home- and community-based treatment models that often yield superior results.

Counties that have made systematic changes to keep youths in their homes and work with their families find that they can serve more kids with the same budgets, keep communities safe and reduce recidivism. Since 2001, Berrien County has gone from 125 youths in facilities outside the county and out-of-state, to just 18 youths outside the county, and all within Michigan. Wayne County likewise had made dramatic changes, helping drive the number of youths in state training schools from 1,200 in 1996 to 260 today.

- Third, we must keep low-level youthful offenders out of court. Serious juvenile crime rates have plummeted since the mid-1990s, yet the numbers of youths adjudicated delinquent, placed in detention, and sentenced to probation have all grown. Michigan's "zero tolerance" policies in schools have caused countless teens to be prosecuted for fistfights and other teenage behaviors that were once handled informally. The American Psychological Association concluded that zero-tolerance policies are associated with more, not less, misbehavior; and lower, not higher, academic achievement in a 2006 study.
- Finally, we must take vigorous action to reduce the shameful and persistent overrepresentation of youths of color in juvenile justice. A handful of farsighted communities have shown that racial disparities can be remedied through focused efforts to review every decision point for underlying biases and to promote practices that equalize treatment. In Michigan, youths of color are three times more likely to be confined than their white peers.

The 2008 Kids Count report found that Michigan has higher rates of placing youths in custody than most other states. We know we can turn this around. It's time to put our knowledge of what works to use. And it's time to provide Michigan youths a measure of justice worthy of the name.

ELIZABETH ARNOVITS is executive director of the Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency. Write to her in care of the Free Press Editorial Page, 615 W. Lafayette, Detroit, MI 48226 or at oped@freepress.com.

Abraham attorney looks to withdraw from case

BY KORIE WILKINS • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • June 25, 2008

The legal woes continue for convicted killer Nathaniel Abraham.

He is scheduled to appear Thursday before 50th District Judge Michael Martinez.

Martinez is expected to consider a motion by Abraham's attorney to withdraw as counsel and another motion by Assistant Oakland County Prosecutor Beth Hand requesting that Abraham be jailed after making four unapproved stops at a gas station and two party stores in Pontiac and Waterford earlier this month.

According to court documents, his attorney, Richard Morgan Jr., filed a request to withdraw as counsel on June 19, citing a breakdown of the attorney-client relationship. Morgan did not respond to calls for comment Tuesday.

Abraham, 22, wears a GPS tether as part of his bond after a May 30 drug arrest and is allowed to leave his mother's home in Pontiac only for court appointments, treatment and drug testing. Hand declined to comment Tuesday.

Abraham was arrested in Pontiac with more than 200 Ecstasy pills. He faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted.

Abraham was 11 when he was charged with killing a Pontiac man. He was convicted of second-degree murder in 1999.

Contact **KORIE WILKINS** at kwilkins@freepress.com.



States ask for citizenship from welfare recipients

6/25/2008, 5:58 a.m. ET

By KATHY BARKS HOFFMAN
The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — For lack of \$10, Margo Kindred was forced to move with her teenage son and three young grandchildren to a homeless shelter.

Though she qualifies for welfare benefits, Kindred didn't find out she needed to present her Colorado birth certificate until after she couldn't afford the motel room she had been renting.

Kindred, of Battle Creek, couldn't scrounge up the \$10 payment to get the document. "I couldn't squeeze it out, because there was nothing left to squeeze," the 38-year-old said.

Michigan is one of the few states that gives health care coverage automatically to children and adults on welfare. But there's a catch: Proof of citizenship is required.

Michigan and Nebraska appear to be the only states so far that won't give cash assistance unless proof of citizenship is shown, although Missouri is joining their ranks. Some states, such as Virginia, require applicants to show a birth certificate or Social Security number. But they allow applicants to sign an affidavit of citizenship if they can't provide the documents. Michigan and Nebraska don't have that out.

The proof of citizenship requirements are being promoted as a way to keep people who are in the country illegally from getting government assistance. But they go beyond having to show a driver's license or proving that, as a foreign resident, a person is in the country legally.

Critics say many people are being forced to wait weeks or even months for help while they get their paperwork in order, while some are so discouraged by the requirement that they don't even apply.

A federal study last year showed that the number of people getting Medicaid coverage dropped in many states after the new requirement was put in place on the federal level. Advocates for the poor in Michigan say the same is happening now to welfare applicants in the state.

"People are not getting the help they need and they're eligible for," said Sharon Parks of the Michigan League for Human Services in Lansing. "It's not right."

For many, like Kindred, the requirement is a surprise. A women's group in Battle Creek eventually put up the money, and state officials approved her payments.

Until they started last month — adding \$91 to her monthly \$598 check — Kindred got by on the children's welfare payments and the food stamps she was able to get because that program didn't require a birth certificate. All the welfare money went to house the family at a small motel.

"It's a struggle to get Pampers or personals, wash clothes," Kindred said.

The Michigan League contends the Michigan rules are keeping eligible people from getting welfare payments, and points to the discrepancy between food stamp and welfare caseloads.

Despite the state's weak economy, Michigan's May welfare caseload was down to its lowest level since December 2002, having dropped by 18 percent in the past year alone.

Yet the food assistance program — which allows people to qualify with far more income — set a record high last month. The number of households getting food stamps has increased about 70 percent since December 2002.

"It's troubling to see the cash assistance numbers falling when we know that the level of need throughout the state is growing," Parks said.

But a director in the Michigan Department of Human Services said the tougher proof of citizenship requirements aren't solely responsible for the decrease. Michigan also has made its work requirements more strict.

"Less people may be applying because of eligibility issues," said Barbara Anders, director of the Bureau of Adult and Family Services. "I don't think we can say it's any one item."

In Nebraska, applicants must show a birth certificate or some other proof of citizenship to get food stamps, welfare payments, medical coverage for children and seniors who are disabled or blind, and for help paying energy bills.

That state hasn't seen the large drop in welfare caseloads Michigan has seen because the state will pay for applicants' birth certificates, removing that hurdle, said Becky Gould of the Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest.

More states are considering proof of citizenship for a variety of programs. Missouri recently passed into law a bill requiring people to prove they are U.S. citizens or legally in the country when applying for food stamps, housing and other public benefits.

On the Net:

Michigan League for Human Services: <http://www.milhs.org>

Michigan Department of Human Services: <http://www.michigan.gov/dhs>

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June 25, 2008

Man charged with murder in Lansing homeless man's death

Midday update

A second suspect was charged with murder this morning for the stabbing death of a homeless man.

James C. Belin now faces the murder charge for last month's stabbing of David Lloyd Melvin.

Belin originally was charged with being an accessory after the fact. Tammy Lynn Vedron was charged last month with Melvin's murder.

During a hearing this morning, attorneys said Melvin was stabbed nearly 90 times.

G. Michael Hocking, Vedron's attorney, said today Belin's clothes were covered in blood while his client's clothes showed no visible sign of blood.

The preliminary hearing for both defendants has been rescheduled for July 16.

Melvin was found stabbed to death in an area dubbed the "Back 40" behind the Volunteers of America complex and other businesses on North Larch Street set between Saginaw and Shiawassee streets.

Youth & Education

DHS picnic a success

■ **Picnic a way to show recognition, say thanks**

FROM STAFF REPORTS

PARIS — The Mecosta-Osceola Department of Human Services sponsored an appreciation picnic in recognition of local DHS relative caregivers, foster parents and adoptive parents.

This event, titled the "May We Say Thank You Picnic" was organized under the planning of the Building Community Partners Committee through DHS.

Area business partners also were acknowledged at the event including Holiday Inn, Cost Cutters, The Sawmill Tubes and Canoes, Mr. Karl's Hairdressing,

Strike Town Lanes and Details Salon in Evart. Each business provides ongoing discounts to support children in out-of-home placement.

Caregivers also learned about and were encouraged to participate in the Caregiver Support Group. This group is open to anyone in Mecosta and Osceola counties and surrounding areas who are raising foster or relative children. The group meets from 6:30 to 8 p.m. the last Tuesday of every month at Community Mental Health in Reed City.

DHS is looking for caring families to become licensed foster parents. For more information on how to get involved, please contact Bill Melcher with the Family to Family Initiative at (231) 796-4322.



DINNER IS SERVED: Mecosta County Department of Human Services Family to Family Coordinator Bill Melcher serves up the barbecue at Paris Park. (Courtesy photo)



June 25, 2008

Law looks to boost kids' safety

On July 1, children under age 8 or shorter than 4 feet, 9 inches need car booster seat

Associated Press

Because of a new state law, kids like 7-year-old Keeghan Ice of Holt will be required to use a booster seat when riding in a car.

His mother, Erin Ice, said she is concerned about the safety of her son when using a booster seat until the age of 8.

"It's kind of crazy. The booster seat gets him up higher. I don't see why he needs it," Erin Ice said. "His center of gravity is up higher. If we were ever to crash, he'd go flying."

Starting July 1, Michigan's new law means children will be required to be in booster seats when riding in vehicles until the age of 8 or until they are at least 4 feet, 9 inches tall - whichever comes first.

Violations could cost from \$65 to \$165 for each unrestrained child in a vehicle, including fines and fees. That's far pricier than the typical booster seat, which runs roughly from \$15 to \$100 depending on the style.

"This is not about writing tickets. This is about keeping children safe," said Maj. Barry Getzen of the Michigan State Police. "Everyday, we see children put at risk because they are not properly restrained while riding in a vehicle."

The child restraint system may be either a child seat with harness straps or a booster seat with no back or a high back, depending on the child's weight. Most children between the ages of 4 and 8 will be using booster seats.

The new law - which Gov. Jennifer Granholm signed in March - is much stricter than Michigan's old statute, which required children under 4 to be in a restraint system.

About 40 states have laws similar to Michigan's new one, with most updated since 2000.

The rules vary from state to state, but most include requiring a booster seat until at least age 6. Some laws require booster seat use up to age 9 unless a child has reached a certain size.

Unlike many states, Michigan's law does not have a weight provision.

Safety is the primary motivator for states to increase the age or size of children mandated to be in a child restraint system.

A booster seat raises children so that the vehicle's seat belt - typically designed for an adult-sized body - fits correctly and better prevents injuries.

John Kepros, director of trauma services for Lansing's Sparrow Hospital, has three children between the ages of 5 and 9. All three used booster seats even before Michigan's law was passed.

"It helps prevent injuries," said Kepros, who participated in a news conference detailing the new law Tuesday.

Angela Stevenson, a mother of twin 10-year-old girls from Lansing, said she sees the new law as an extra precaution in child safety, although it could potentially pose a financial strain on parents having to get booster seats.

"It's not a burden," Stevenson said.

"You want the safety for your children. The question is, are you able to get the seats, or can you afford them? That's when it becomes a burden."

State Journal reporter Gerrick Lewis contributed to this report.



June 25, 2008

Proposed amendment aimed at downsizing Mich. government

Morning update

Dawson Bell
Special to the State Journal

LANSING -- A sweeping revision of the Michigan Constitution that would cut state politicians' pay and benefits where it doesn't eliminate their jobs altogether came out of nowhere in recent weeks and appears to have a realistic chance of making the ballot in November.

The lengthy and complicated proposed amendment would overhaul much of the state's political structure, including the hyper-partisan process of drawing legislative district boundaries.

By coincidence or design, many changes appear to come at the expense of Republicans, especially in the judicial branch. Eight of the nine judges who would lose their jobs -- including two Supreme Court justices -- came out of the Republican Party.

But the proposal, officially sponsored by an obscure group based in Hastings called Reform Michigan Government Now!, is clearly designed to take advantage of public dissatisfaction across the board with the state of governance and politics in Michigan.

Its provisions include:

- A 25% pay cut for the governor and lawmakers. (The governor currently makes \$177,000 and legislators make \$79,650.)
- A 15% pay cut for judges. (Supreme Court justices make \$164,610.)
- A reduction from 38 to 28 state senators and from 110 to 82 state representatives.

Dianne Byrum, a former Democratic lawmaker who is now a consultant representing the ballot committee, said the changes would "streamline the size of government" and reduce the influence of special interests and lobbyists.

"I think government is broken," Byrum said. "It's not the fault of any one individual, but this will make elected officials more responsive to the people who put them in office."

Byrum said the proposed amendment isn't aimed at giving one political party an advantage.

But she declined to discuss how the amendment was developed and by whom, or to disclose the source of the campaign's considerable financial resources. It has paid a firm to circulate petitions, but Byrum wouldn't say how many signatures have been gathered. Signatures were gathered during the weekend in many places, including an art fair Sunday in Royal Oak.

The campaign needs to collect the signatures of more than 380,000 registered voters by July 7 to qualify for the Nov. 4 ballot.

Several Democratic Party insiders who declined to be identified said drafting of the amendment, which is nearly two-thirds the length of the entire 1963 revised constitution now in effect, was overseen by state party Chairman Mark Brewer. Brewer, through a spokeswoman, declined to respond to a question about his role. The insiders said they believe the campaign has or will turn in at least 500,000 signatures by the deadline.

Republican Party Chairman Saul Anuzis said that regardless of authorship, the amendment provisions read like a "Mark Brewer wish list" designed to aid in a Democratic Party takeover of state government. Republicans said the proposed changes in the judicial branch are a transparent attempt to reverse GOP gains in the courts from the 1990s.

The amendment calls for the elimination of two seats on the Supreme Court and seven seats on the Court of Appeals, using two methods, both of which maximize Democratic Party gains. The only judge with Democratic Party roots to lose a seat in the shuffle would be Appeals Judge Helene White, who won't be there anyway because she won confirmation Tuesday to a seat on the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Additionally, a provision that would slash pension benefits for judges who stay on the job after the amendment is enacted could trigger a wave of resignations and give Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm dozens of vacancies to fill through appointments that usually go to party loyalists.

Robert LaBrant, a vice president at the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, said the rule changes all appear to either create an advantage for Democrats or erase one now held by Republicans. He called the proposal an "outrageous abuse" of the process for changing the state constitution.

"This isn't an amendment; this is a general revision of the Michigan Constitution," LaBrant said. "This proposal covers the waterfront."

Rich Robinson, director of the Michigan Campaign Finance Network, said many aspects of the plan -- mandatory financial disclosure for elected officials and 2-year bans on lobbying for retired lawmakers -- are attractive.

"But it's a huge package," Robinson said. And the reforms do not address one glaring shortcoming in Michigan political regulation: campaign finance rules that allow a hugely expensive ballot proposal campaign to operate without transparency for months leading up to an election.

"It's an absolutely ridiculous system that results in us not knowing anything about who is behind this until a month after they get on the ballot," Robinson said.

Contact Free Press reporter Dawson Bell at (313) 222-6604 or dbell@freepress.com.
